

URABON

The new calendar says that the Bon falls on July 15th, but in this case the new calendar is largely ignored because the things that concern the dead are still done more or less properly in Japan. The traditional events are held a month later, which puts them at least in the right season and sometimes near the right date.

Around this time a heat wave usually hits Kyoto. The thoughts are far from such heavenly things as star lovers and their cool one night Yoshiwara. But those who, freely perspiring, participate in the observance will for once have the feeling of being in a Buddhist country after all. This feeling really begins with the Gion summer festival, the various events of which stretch over a month, beginning with the August Palanquins of the Yasaka shrine being taken to the Kamo river to be washed and then set up on the kagura stage of the shrine. The washing, it is true, now takes place right on Shi Jo Bridge from plastic buckets, a descent to the river being impossible at that point today. But the mi koshi have such a lofty air and the spirit of the crowd is so neighbourly and hilarious that it remains a real ceremony. Having been displayed on the kagura stage for a while, surrounded by hundreds of paper lanterns offered up by neighborhood tradehouses and individuals, the mi koshi ride off on the shoulders of large groups of Gion Machi men to a temporary place on Shijo on the other side of the Kamo river. This very lively and noisy affair at the Yasaka Shrine is by far the most

beautiful part of the Gion Festival. The supreme detachment of the mi koshi as they rise, dip and sway over all that human noise and scurrying is moving and awesome. There deigns to ride Susano O no Mikoto, one never doubts.

When the mi koshi are set up on West Shi Jo, it is the custom, particularly observed by the Gion Geisha, to walk there to pay one's respects and for good fortune during this walk not a word must be said. The Geishas' admirers contrive to be somewhere along the route and try by banter and provocation to get them to break their silence.

The floats to be carried on the famous July 17th parade are by this time set up along the Shi Jo and its side streets, too. The night before the parade and the parade itself are the central part of the festival and one of Kyoto's major tourist attractions, but even this part retains something genuine. The last event is again the washing of the mi koshi before they are put back in the treasure house. This return from the river, preceded by the pure sound of bells, even in the busy evening street is an ima-mukashi moment.

The originator of the Bon is Shakyamuni himself. One summer the disciple Maudgalyayana became aware that his mother had been reborn as a preta and try as he might, he was unable to relieve her suffering. He appealed to the Buddha who compassionately agreed to do something about it. When the period of summer retirement was over, he ordered a great festival held for all fathers and mothers of the seven worlds. The monks of

Ten Directions participated and the five kinds of fruit, and food and drink of a hundred flavors were provided. As a result of this huge banquet Maudgalyayana's mother was freed from her pain.

urayamashi
mukae gane tsuku
hito no oya
(Hai Zange)

resentment!
the meeting bell rings
other people's parents

The bell here referred to is the bell of Chinoji.

Traditionally on the 9th and 10th of the seventh month, but now on those dates in August, one goes to this temple to ring the welcome bell. Its sound is heard by the dead in the Hells who are thus alerted to the coming of the Bon. The temple is on a once famous street, Matsu Bara, which during Bon days is lined with booths selling various things for the festival.

The image in the main hall is a Yakushi Nyorai. On a spot called the Six Paths' Crossroads stands a large group of Jizo. This was once the entrance to a burial ground and tradition has it that the poet Ono no Takamura, founder of the temple, somehow managed to go down to Hell and come back from somewhere around here. A stone pillar commemorates this event.

It must not be thought that things always went so smoothly for Takamura. Once, about to embark with an embassy to China, he quarreled with the main envoy and resigned, later writing a Chinese poem ridiculing the embassy. The retired Emperor Saga was not amused and Takamura was sent into banishment. He is said to have passed the time quite pleasantly composing non-humorous Chinese poems and the following year was pardoned and called back.

During the Bon, temples prominently display statues of Emma, the King of Hell, and Hell pictures. The picture at Chinoji is set up right in the open with just a small roof over it so that one can study it quite closely. Nearby, Rokuharamitsu-ji, too, is a center of much Bon activity. The principal image here is an Eleven-Headed Kwannon, but a famous blue-eyed Emma has the place of honor at this time. Particularly in the evening the area is then crowded and lively as a market place, the street filled with the smoke and scent of incense offerings billowing from the temple.

The dead return for a brief visit to their former homes, welcomed by fires or lanterns lit at the gate. Food of the five colors is set out on the family altar, white utensils for the newly dead, red for those who have seen more than one Bon. Special chopsticks are not forgotten. For those pretas who have no homes to return to, food is offered outside and sutras are read for family dead and strangers alike.

tama matsuri
ryori cho ari
fude no ato

(Buson)

Spirit Festival
recipe booklet there is
brush writing

One of two things must happen. During the Bon pretas are able to see food and drink, or knowing just where to go they find it without seeing it. Here the mother who has died will find the same dishes she prepared for her dead, because the daughter (or daughter-in-law) has found her recipe booklet. The daughter-in-law

~~probably. How she will strive to get everything right, as she honored and tried to please the living person!~~

tama dana ya
boda mochi sameru
aki no kaze
(Ōgi)

spirit shelf ya
boda rice cakes it cools
the autumn wind

A difficult situation. Boda mochi are soft rice cakes covered with a sweet bean sauce. They should be eaten hot, because cooled off they become hard and inedible. Naturally one does not want the unsuspecting to burn their mouths, but worse still if the one time feast should be inedible before the guests arrived.

In both haiku the first two lines are very humble. Like Maudgalyayana, one does what one can but it isn't much.

That part of the Bon that corresponds to Shakyamuni's great feast is the Bon Odori, meant to be danced at the full moon of the 7th month, which is the date summer seclusion for monks ended in Japan. Unfortunately the meaning and function of this dance has been destroyed. What remains is nothing more potent than a folk dance evening and there is no real point in attending one.

haha Shikibu
yami yori yami e
odori kana
(Shundei)

mama Shikibu
darkness from, darkness to
the dance kana

Izumi Shikibu wrote the poem this haiku refers to.

uba tama no
yami yori idete
yami ni iru
haruka ni terase
yama no ha no tsuki

From

jet-jewelled come out
darkness from there rising
to darkness going
widely shine,
mountain rim moon

The words in the haiku could not be simpler, but it is very baffling and powerful. Why "haha Shikibu"? Several reasons. This dance too is for the fathers and mothers of the seven worlds and as all beings have at some time been our kind parents, one stands in this relation to Izumi Shikibu too, and with her poem in mind, would dance with all one's might from the rising to the setting of the moon.

Mothers too participate in the dance and perhaps Shikibu is imagined to do so here. There is a haiku on the Odori that says that the child is hidden and the parents hide. The dance is of course a great melee and there must be dark places and light places through which the dancers pass. It could be just that.

But the Odori is actually a version of the dance of Krishna and the gopis, and in its pure form involved licentious practices. Izumi Shikibu was a very amorous woman, a female Krishna if such a thing could be imagined. And during this night, when a great effort is made to forever take away the offenses for which the dead suffer, by purification through blissfulness—an Izumi Shikibu would be very active and effective. In and out of the dance, now you see her, now you don't. It could be that.

Also, like other great poets, she is seen as the moon, whose path accompanies and is like the circle of the dance. And, as is natural, she was somebody's mother. Her daughter, Ko Shikibu

Some of this will be incomprehensible as the Kokata section has been removed and must be pushed, prodded and whispered at, amid laughter and cries of endearment from the audience. The play is out the window ^{for} and it remains for the shite to pick up the pieces as best he ^{can} after the debutant has safely been herded off stage.

But aged three or no, it is a fine thing to watch a Noh actor teach his Ato Tsugi, the child that is heir to the house. Given the chance, children like interesting things and these Noh infants delight in singing and dancing, playfully imitate their elders' formal ways and naturally use honorifics when referring to masks and such. During the lessons no nonsense is taken, particularly from an Ato Tsugi. Lest the father's role be misunderstood by such a baby, a cold, aloof voice is used, and however small, the son begins and ends the lesson with a kowtow, formally thanking the teacher for favors received.

Beyond an insistence on white tabi (Japanese socks) no attention is paid to practice clothes and the children wear whatever Western outfit they happen to be romping about it. Perhaps one reason why one hardly sees meshi-koto-ni-nareshi-kokata anymore.

Uchi deshi no
reigi tadashiku
hagi no mae

(Takeshi)

the house-apprentice's
respectful conduct correct
before bush clover

139

First training in Noh is almost always with the father.

The Ato Tsugi is likely to remain under his father's guidance, with possibly a period of final study as house apprentice to some very celebrated teacher or with the Ie Moto (House Root = Head) of the school of Noh the family belongs to. Unless the family itself is very prominent, the younger sons may be apprenticed elsewhere after they have gained enough skill to be useful.

It is the comely behavior of a young man in these circumstances that is here looked at against a background of flowering bush clover. A person yet learning, but who in his performance of respectful conduct is as effortless as a plant responding to the season.

It is really quite funny. Noh has two skills, singing and dancing. And three forms, Woman, Warrior, Old Man. The kokata learns to sing and dance, but is not permitted to wear a mask or

otherwise attempt the imitation of the three forms. The deshi's first instruction in these will properly be through young woman roles. According to the rules, the woman form at its easiest is to be mastered first.

This young man is not only showing off his skill in front of hagi (hagi no mae), at other times he is Hagi no Mae, the Lady Hagi.

hagi susuki
tsukanete orishi
no no hito

(Shiro)

hagi susuki
sheaved that carry are
Noh people

And this is mastery. Susuki grows taller than a kokata, hagi can grow to the height of a youth. Hagi susuki together are here merely something held lightly in the hands of mature men.

A correct use of the body having been attained, we now see a display of the proper use of things. Imagine it to be in the mountains, where people have gone to write autumn haiku on hagi and susuki. A stalk here and there is picked and it is possible to tell from the way they are handled that these are Noh people.

A variety of "props" is used in Noh, branches, rakes, small buckets, flower baskets, canes The handling of these is deliberate yet so loose that the object is not intruded upon but holds its own reality. As soon as it has functioned, it is removed by the koken. There is something rather awesome in the uncluttered way an object is abandoned by the shite, just as there is a touch of fear in one who watches the perfect, almost absent position of the shite hand on a thing.

Nor is it puzzling that these great poets seem to pervade even some plays in which they do not figure.

There is a way of viewing Noh as the Dance of Shiva that is related to Narihira. And a more final way of viewing it as Om, related to Komachi. That this was an open secret in the old days is apparent from Basho's Komachi Moon ku, for depending on the emphasis, Om is held to have three, five, or seven parts.

aki hare no
koke dera ni kite
tomo to au

autumn clear
Moss Temple coming there
a friend one meets

Today's Koke Dera in momiji time (for it almost has to be momiji time) is not a likely place for this kind of exhilarating chance meeting. Shuffling along the paths caught in a stream of other shufflers, one might catch sight of a friend being carried off by just such a stream going the other way and shout directions for a meeting later, but that is not the same thing. One could start out by going with the perfect companion. Very good too but again not quite the same.

Before the war, and even for years after, which is when this haiku was written, Kyoto was not such a crowded place and there had not developed the awful custom of going to famous places by the tens if not hundreds of busloads. To accomodate these buses, temple walls are ripped out, temple grounds asphaltized, and whole mountain-sides defaced with "skyways" and "drive-ways." In English, because the Japanese language cannot be twisted to include these arid concepts.

Officially called Sai Ho Ji (West Perfume Temple), Koke Dera is in the Western Hills, across the To Getsu Bridge and southwest from Arashi Yama. It claims to have the oldest unchanged pond in Japan and like many old ponds, this one is in the shape of the character kokoro, "heart," or, ultimately, citta, "mind," in the sense of central feeling-consciousness. Outside the paths, the grounds are covered with a great variety of mosses, beautiful at any time, but perhaps most so after rain, or when the momiji are at their height or have scattered over the green.

The affinity of moss and autumn leaves probably comes out of Chinese poetry. It might not be incorrect to say that with the ninth month, if not earlier with the autumn moon, one reaches the Chinese part of the year. Some ninth-month plays combine all these elements (Shojo, Matsu Mushi), others stress one or more of them (Kiku Jido, Iwa Fune, Ikkaku Sennin, Momiji Gari), others again leave them all out, the purely Japanese plays (Tsune Masa, Hana Gatami, No no Miya, Kiyo Tsune). History plays, one might say, except that all Noh plays are that.

In this group, too, belong Eboshi Ori and Kumasaka, two plays dealing with the same event: the first act as a man of the perfect hero, Minamoto no Yoshitsune. Indirectly, drink and markets do enter these plays, if not in their auspicious form, because Yoshitsune's first act of valor is in defense of gold-^{who} merchants, insensate with wine, who are attacked by robbers at an inn. In Eboshi Ori Yoshitsune is the kokata; in Kumasaka, the name of the head robber, he does not appear, but the battle is acted out as vividly that one feels he is not visible only because he is so fast.

It is said that in any form of Buddhist endeavor there are always two stages; first bliss, then power.

That is perhaps the most helpful thing to consider in the Noh-Joruri-Kabuki order.

nokoru kaki
mata hitotsu otsu
shimo no asa
(Yoshio)

remaining persimmons
again one falls
frost morning

So unobtrusive, almost invisible, as the flowers of the persimmon tree are, so richly impressive are its fruit come to ripeness on leafless boughs when the sky is at its deepest blue. Kaki are a favorite gift in their season and strings of them are dried for later use as well, but the trees bear so abundantly that it is virtually impossible to dispose of the whole crop. Thus, even as late as the Month of Frost (lunar eleventh) one may still see a single, wishing-jewel shaped kaki on a tree here and there. Until one morning the tree lets go even of it, unseen, but heard by the person just waking up and aware that in the night frost has settled.

The haiku's beautiful country feeling as much as the mention of falling kaki brings to mind the Fallen Persimmon Cottage, Raku Shi Sha, another of the famous places in the Saga area.

As an example of how to live in the country this little house is perfect, and no wonder, for it was chosen by the great haijin Kyorai when he retired from the capital.

There were then as many as forty persimmon trees around it, an awful lot of fruit for a solitary person. In an odd moment, it seems Kyorai started negotiations with a merchant about selling the whole batch. But before the deal was consummated, one night in a storm all the persimmons were hurled to the ground. End of Kyorai's career as a fruit grower. Very pleased, he named his hut Fallen Persimmon Cottage.

kaki nushi ya
kozue ni chikaki
Arashi Yama

(Kyorai)

kaki owner ya
branch tips, near to them
Storm Mountain

Raku Shi Sha has a distant view of Arashi Yama. There are only a few persimmon trees in the garden now, but from the right spot one can still get that same effect of branches hanging down almost to touch the mountain. In part the haiku pokes fun at Kyorai's missed sale. With Arashi Yama so close, the kaki owner ought to have known a storm might rise at any time.

Being a haijin, and one of Basho's main disciples at that, Kyorai, of course, already had satori before he ever moved to Raku Shi Sha. Otherwise one could be tempted to see Yoshio's ku as an imagination of that splendid moment. In any case, the underlying tone of sudden insight gives it a classical feeling. It evokes the country, but also the kind of spacious, tranquil mind possessed by those who lived in the Buddha's time and who from a falling flower, a burning mountain, could come to understand the nature of all things.

Recently there has been a great deal of building in the Arashi Yama-Saga area, worst item a perfectly pointless elevated

highway that goes no where but is supposed to delight the tourist. Months of protests by the people who live there of course availed them nothing.

Fortunately, the approach to Raku Shi Sha is still along dirt roads, and past ricefields, temples and the grave of an Imperial Princess. From some distance away over the hedge the rush roof can be seen and, depending on the season, beckoning banana trees ("basho") or suzuki and hagi. The cottage was rebuilt in Meiji times and the keeper actually lives there, which is nice in a way, but not so nice if one looks into the rooms, as of course one wants to. Then the clutter of newspapers and other accoutrements of modern living is rather jarring. Nevertheless, the atmosphere of the place is very strong, because one knows this really is the ground Kyorai and Basho walked, and the distant view is the same view they saw.

Basho came up from Edo once to stay with his pupil for seventeen days, during which he visited all the famous places around there and wrote his Saga Nikki (Saga Diary). About the grounds are a number of haiku stones with haiku written by the two haijin. One of the loveliest imaginable little red plums stands by one of the stones. For all these reasons, a place to visit and revisit in any season.

Between Raku Shi Sha and the Nison In, in a small, shady cemetery made up mostly of dilapidated monks' graves, Kyorai is buried too. A most casual little grave his, just a small natural

stone with "Kyorai" carved on it. One rarely meets anyone there, yet there are always offerings of fruit and wild flowers and people continually build little stupas by it of the small stones that lie about.

Haijin are greatly honored even today.

The Nilson In is built on the slopes of Ogura Yama, in the annals of poetry an illustrious mountain, because in its seclusion Fujiwara no Sadaie made the Hundred Poets One Poem Collection.

Always in the time of winter rains, so it is said in the play Teika, the poet would retire to his Winter Rain Pavillion (Shigure no Chin) to reflect on mono no aware. And as out of the vast store of Yamato poetry this poem or that would come to mind, he wrote it down. Once, leisurely reading through what he had copied out during many winter retreats, he found that there was one poem by each of the hundred poets whose portraits were painted on the sliding walls in his mountain house and that together they made a collection which held, as in a small treasury ("ogura"), the essence of all Japanese poetry.

In Shoshi Arai Komachi the shite states that she knows every word of the 8,000 poems in the Manyoshu (Ten Thousand Leaves Collection). This is no extravagant claim. All those whose concern was the health of the state memorized these poems, as later they memorized the Kokinshu and later still the Shinkokinshu. Out of his total grasp Sadaie now arranged these hundred poems by a hundred poets in such a way that this small collection could function to the same lofty purpose in the latter ages, when people's capacities decline.

Since the Meiji era the Nison In has belonged to the Tendai sect, but prior to that it was largely Amidist. It is an unusual temple, spacious, elegant and rather somber. Two Bhagavan (Ni Son) are enshrined in the main hall: a Sending-Off-to-the-Pure Land Shakyamuni, and a Welcoming-to-the-Pure Land Amida. The statues date from Kamakura times when the temple was built, on the former site of a Tendai temple, by a deshi of the great Amidist Master Honen Shōnin.

A ways to the right of the main hall a very long steep run of stone steps leads up to a beautiful Chinese-style stone building called the Mausoleum of Honen Shōnin. Actually, the spirit tablet enshrined there is that of his disciple, but it is right that it should be the Shonin's mausoleum as well, for no one now knows what happened to the stupa built over Honen's ashes.

Like so many eminent monks, as a novice Honen studied at Enryakuji, the great Tendai temple on Mt. Hiei. Later he founded his own Amidist sect, the Jōdō (Pure Land) School. Nevertheless, when he died and was temporarily buried at Higashi Yama Otani cemetery, the Enryakuji monks laid claim to his remains. Hearing this, Honen's own disciples at night secretly removed the coffin, first hiding it at someone's house in Saga, and later committing it to the flames at another secret spot in the Western Hills. The exact place is in the precincts of the present Kōmyōji. The ashes were then buried at the Nison In and a stupa built over them.

To the right of the Mausoleum and a long way up the mountain, all is a cemetery, with many beautiful old stupas and graves. Not cared for, but pleasant to walk among, particularly at dusk in

autumn. How different from the present-day Higashi Yama Otani, which is not worth a visit, whatever its tradition.

Going left, following markers with the legend "Shigure no Chin," the path almost vanishes, until quite high uphill a rather tangled, messy spot is finally indicated as the former site of Sadaie's retreat. Maybe so, but it is by no means the only place in Saga to claim that honor. Besides Onri An, a nunnery that is also said to have the poet's grave but is not open to the public, there is Jojakuji, the Nison In's more rustic and modest neighbor. Before there was a temple on this side of the mountain, one of Nichiren's followers, Nisshin Shonin, had a hermitage there. This was in Tokugawa times. There was then no hint of any connection with the Shigure no Chin.

But when they were building the temple, progressing higher and higher up the slope, one of Nisshin's deshi fell into a fit. He cried that he was Fujiwara no Sadaie and that it was not proper that buildings should be constructed above his house.

It is an indication of the esteem accorded poets in classical Japan that the monks hastened to set this matter right by building well above the temple a small shrine to Sadaie and to a spot adjoining it they moved what were thought to be the remains of the Shigure no Chin.

Seami puts the Winter Rain Pavillion in Miyako itself, near Senbon-Imadegawa. This is not a delectable part of town now, but things were different in Seami's time and furthermore he had a reason.

Specifically, Teika (which is the Chinese reading for Sadaie) takes place at the Hanju In. The waki, walking about this area, during a sudden rainfall enters an empty, elegant looking house for shelter. This proves to be the Shigure no Chin. If it was ever there, which is unlikely, nothing at Hanju In today indicates where it might have stood. The temple's proud relic is Teika Kazura, the Teika Vine, which overgrows, to the point of hiding, the grave of a Princess, Shiki Shi Nai Shin O, in Sadai's time a poetess of great renown.

At two principal shrines, the shrine at Ise and the Kamo shrine, there always was an Imperial Virgin Priestess. Shiki Shi Nai Shin O, third daughter of the Emperor Go Shirakawa, served at the Kamo shrine, until at the age of eighteen she fell ill and returned to court. There Sadaie became passionately enamored of her. Though he was a Fujiwara and as a poet of the era second to none, his court rank was then by no means very high. But the story goes one time he managed to be near enough the Princess to whisper:

nageku to mo
kou to mo awamu
michi ya naki
kimi kazura ki no
mine no shira kumo

though one yearn
though one love, to meet -
no way, I suppose
my Mistress: Kazuraki
peak's white clouds

The last two lines of course mean that she is very distant, far beyond the poet's reach.

In haiku the particle ya (~~always after nouns~~) indicates that the haiku is using one of the two forms of power, the other form being indicated by kana (following a noun), or keri (after verbs). When no particle appears it means that the two forces are in perfect balance. Obviously, to make sense of a haiku, whenever a haijin uses a particle it must be maintained as a sound. The grammatical ya as used in tanka, on the other hand, gives a nuance of meaning and

an attempt to translate it should be made. Here it functions as an invitation to denial. A lightly questioning I suppose about covers it.

To continue the story: "This Lord was extremely ugly and the Princess did not choose to honor him with a return poem, but turned away saying wonderingly: 'With that face!'"

This might have floored anyone, but Sadaie came right back with another poem:

saraba koso
yoru to wa chigire
Kazuraki no
kami mo waga mi mo
onaji kokoro ni

if it be so indeed
"Only at night," the thus pledged
Kazuraki God
and this person
their hearts, the same.

Why, will become apparent later, but the obvious meaning is: "I may be ugly, but I perform ardently and well in the dark when all cats are black anyway." But the second, more obscure meaning will not have been lost on the Lady: "If we should spend the night together and I should happen to leave after dawn, you, beautiful creature, might well appear like an ogress to me and I might never want to come back."

Three strands go to make up this meaning. First there is the tradition that the Demons of other lands in Japan manifest as beautiful women. Second, a relevant poem by the Lady Sakon to a lover who would not go home at dawn. And last, more remote but most basic, the story of Crown Prince Siddhartha (the future Buddha), who rose one morning and looking down at his sleeping Nautch girls saw them as so many ogresses whose sleep-abandoned bodies held no

more attraction than bloated corpses in the cremation ground.

And as one knows, he never did come back.

How is one to accept that Sadaie was ugly! Every fiber revolts. Well, how is one to accept that the Buddha's great disciple Maudghalyayana died being torn limb from limb! Such stories demonstrate that whatever the person's virtue in this life, previous karma cannot be abrogated, but that karmic effects have no power over a mind developed to perfect soundness. Dismemberment was no impediment to Maudghalyayana's entering into Nirvana, ugliness was no restriction on Sadaie. The comparison is useful because it proves that classical Japan in the Kali Age maintained a society of equal validity to that in the Buddha's lifetime, which again gives new reality to the saying that the Buddha is always in the world. All things not consistent with that are a snare and a delusion to be cast off with all possible speed.

"If people of old could do it, why can't we; one man is as good as another."

Poetry, Tsurayuki has said, softens the relationship between men and women, so it is not surprising that Sadaie's second poem softened the heart of Shiki Shi Nai Shin O.

Teika is the story of the love that developed between them.

kazuraki no
wata motte tsuzumu
kasa no yuki
(Omonada)

Kazuraki
with cotton concealed
snow on the kasa